



## CATAWBA COUNTY

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July 20, 2007

Mr. David Thompson, Executive Director  
North Carolina Association of County Commissioners  
215 North Dawson Street  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This letter nominates Katherine W. "Kitty" Barnes, Chair of the Catawba County Board of Commissioners, for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners' M.H. "Jack" Brock Outstanding County Commissioner Award.

By any measure, Kitty Barnes is an outstanding example of a county commissioner and public servant with tremendous energy, intelligence, commitment to serving the public, and a firm belief in the importance of sound government.

The definition of the Brock Award states, in part, that the successful candidate is one who "has demonstrated special achievements and efforts, primarily during the past 12 months, on behalf of county government throughout the state and/or region, not just within his or her county".

Whether one considers her work over the past year on the State and Local Fiscal Modernization Study Committee or her completion of a successful year as NCACC President; her service as Vice-Chair of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Policy Board and as a member of the Charlotte Area Elected Officials EPA Task Force; or her work at home as chair of the Board of Directors of the innovative Hickory Metro Higher Education Center and the Unifour Air Quality Oversight Committee, she clearly embodies the definition of the Brock Award.

Kitty Barnes' positive impact on all levels of government is quickly demonstrated by a review of her most recent accomplishments. On the state level, these include:

**President of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, 2005-2006:** Kitty's year as President of the Association included the building of significant momentum on the issue of permanent relief for counties from the burden of Medicaid, and increasing awareness of the need for a menu of revenue options for local governments. Both of these items remain the highest priority for NCACC.

An important part of her term as NCACC President was the implementation of the Association's Strategic Plan, which she helped developed in previous years. This long-range planning initiative led to the creation of separate teams to study and implement five diverse goals identified at the beginning of the process. These goals include: 1)



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inform and educate the public and media about county government; 2) strengthen county leadership and board development; 3) redefine the role of counties and the state-county relationship by creating a partnership with the state; 4) enhance the ability of county officials to represent counties and the NCACC on local and statewide issues and, 5) facilitate regional and intergovernmental collaboration.

The intellectual seeds planted through this strategic planning began to bear fruit during Kitty's term and beyond, in late 2006 and 2007. One team is recruiting members for a Speaker's Bureau, while another created a New Commissioners Mentoring Program, and the State and Local Fiscal Modernization Study Committee, on which Kitty serves, did much to strengthen the partnership between state and county governments.

Kitty Barnes' term as Association President also included a successful transition to a new administration, with the hiring of a new Association Executive Director

**Member, State and Local Fiscal Modernization Study Committee:** Kitty has served diligently on this committee, which is charged with examining state and local revenue sharing and taxing authority, and the division of responsibility for providing infrastructure, public education, Medicaid and other needs. Kitty has been a faithful member as the committee's work is ongoing. The committee is credited with impressing an increasing number of legislators with the importance of relieving counties of the Medicaid burden.

**Member, North Carolina Mental Health Reform Study Group:** Kitty Barnes's service on this important group helped create a reform of the state's mental health system, so that government agencies now serve in an oversight capacity over services provided by mental health providers in the private sector.

**Member, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Task Force on Public Health:** This task force, originally created by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2003 to study public health in North Carolina and devise an action plan to strengthen public health infrastructure, improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities, was re-convened in 2006 to update that study.

"Kitty has been a strong advocate for local public health," said Catawba County's Public Health Director, Douglas W. Urland. "She often takes a stand to do the right things for the right reasons, even if that means being the lone voice on an issue. Kitty took a leadership role in the Public Health Task Force, serving on the central Task Force committee as well as on the Finance committee. The Task Force and its seven committees made recommendations on Infrastructure Development for Public Health and Improving Service Gaps.

"Kitty is always a proponent for improving services and providing those services in the most effective and efficient manner. While on this task force, Kitty was emphatic about ensuring the recommendations were heard and understood by the public, that local input was received and considered, and that State funding was available to implement the recommendations. Kitty effectively utilized opportunities such as letter writing, speaking engagements, contacting legislators, and mobilizing the NCACC to ensure counties were not given another unfunded mandate," Urland added.

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**North Carolina School Boards Association, Master Board Trainer:** In this role, Kitty is continuing a life's service to education by assisting new and recently elected school board members to better serve their constituents, school staff and students.

On a regional level, Kitty Barnes has been very active in improving education, economic development, our quality of life and concerns about the quality of our environment. Recent accomplishments include:

**Chair, Hickory Metro Higher Education Center:** Kitty was instrumental in the creation of the Center in 2002 and now serves as chair of its Board of Directors. She also helped secure State and Federal funding for the center, which is a collaborative partnership among Appalachian State University, Catawba Valley Community College, Lenoir-Rhyne College, Northwest AHEC, UNC Charlotte, UNC Chapel Hill, Western Carolina University and Winston-Salem State University. The Center's purpose is to support and enhance the educational attainment and economic development of the region by offering a broad range of programming in targeted areas of study, as needed and requested by the community.

**Chairperson, Unifour Air Quality Oversight Committee and member, Charlotte Area Elected Officials EPA Task Force:** When Catawba County learned in 2001 that it was in danger of being sanctioned for excessive ozone pollution by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and would be sanctioned for levels of particulate matter out of compliance with Federal standards, Kitty did not sit idly by. She followed her customary practice of learning as much as possible about the issue and volunteered for service on the Charlotte area task force, dedicated to finding solutions to the environmental concerns of the entire Charlotte region. She served as member, and now as chairperson, of the Unifour Air Quality Oversight Committee which has studied the specific environmental issues of Alexander, Burke, Catawba and Caldwell counties. Her efforts helped lead to the creation of a set of strategies to reduce particulate matter and ozone pollution, which have resulted in a reduction in the area's ozone levels. She also helped persuade the EPA to provide clarification into discrepancies regarding its listing of Catawba County in both the "good" category for air quality, and "out of compliance" on particulate matter, and for more specific recommendations on strategies that will reduce particulate matter.

**Vice-Chair, Western Piedmont Council of Governments Policy Board:** Kitty serves on a board that sets policy and directs the activities of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, a regional planning organization serving 28 local governments in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties, and the 24 municipalities within these counties. The council provides planning services, project administration and technical assistance to member governments and the region as a whole. She will serve as chair of the policy board in 2008.

On the local level, in Catawba County and its municipalities, Kitty Barnes has had an extremely positive impact over the last twenty years, and within the last year:

**Consultant on a plan to merge the Local Managing Entities providing mental health service oversight in Burke and Catawba Counties:** Kitty drew on her service to the North Carolina Mental Health Reform Study Group as Catawba County sought ways to meet a State mandate regarding the population that should be served by a Local Managing Entity, and as Burke County

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sought a new provider of mental health services. The Boards of Commissioners from both counties negotiated a merger for several months, after Catawba County studied potential partnerships with several surrounding counties. Burke and Catawba Counties have agreed to a one-year interim arrangement on joint management of mental health services while the final details of a permanent merger are finalized.

Catawba County's Area Mental Health Director, John M. Hardy, said of Kitty Barnes's work in the area of mental health services, "She has carefully tracked on the details of the major changes associated with Mental Health Reform in North Carolina and has effectively offered the county perspective. She has also been instrumental in meeting with commissioners from Burke County to negotiate a partnership where both counties could be better served by working together in the delivery of mental health services to citizens. Her willingness to understand the many legislative issues and requirements, appreciate the importance of quality services to people with various disabling conditions, and her genuine empathy for people have all contributed to her abilities to be an effective leader in helping communities be responsive to their citizens."

**Development and approval of a sweeping consolidation of Catawba County's land use ordinances:** Kitty led the Catawba County Board of Commissioners during the challenging task of analyzing a massive Unified Development Ordinance, which combined all of the County's existing regulations concerning land use and development into a single, coordinated ordinance. She led the Board through an extensive review and public hearing process, which included considerable input from the professional development community and the manufactured housing industry in opposition to parts of the ordinance.

**Courage to meet the growing needs of schools, and a burgeoning inmate population, through a reasoned increase in property taxes after all efforts failed to bring about a local option one cent sales tax or relief from Medicaid before July 1, 2007:** Kitty and the other members of the Board of Commissioners faced considerable pressures from both ends of a spectrum with regard to funding needs. A nine cent property tax increase was recommended to address a necessary four year school construction cycle and an expansion to the Catawba County Detention Center, to upgrade a 27 year old facility that had been housing an average of 80 prisoners more than its capacity, per day. After hearing from constituents, the Board determined that the full nine cent increase would place too great a burden on citizens living on a fixed income and set a budget with a tax increase of 6.75 cents. During that period, the Board faced criticism from some school officials and citizens for not implementing the full nine cent increase, and also from others who felt any tax increase was too much. Kitty's leadership led the County to a balanced position on this difficult issue.

Kitty Barnes's service to her local community cannot be accurately portrayed without examining a few highlights from the past.

- She served on the Catawba County Board of Education from 1986-1998 including three years as that board's chairperson. She was named 1998 winner of the Raleigh Dingman Award for Outstanding Boardmanship from the North Carolina School Boards Association.
- She has served on the Catawba County Public Health Board and Mental Health Services Board

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- She has served as President, and in other capacities, of the Catawba County Council For The Arts
- She has served on the Board of Directors of the Girl Scout Council of the Catawba Valley Area

All of this service and accomplishment still does not paint the full picture of the outstanding public service of Kitty Barnes. Those of us who have been privileged to work with her know that her dedication and character also make her a deserving nominee for the M.H. "Jack" Brock Outstanding County Commissioner Award.

Kitty has an incredible capacity to retain knowledge and facts. She is one of the most studious people we have ever known. One has to work very hard to match her ability to research a given subject, learn everything that can be known on that subject, and be ready to meet an issue with a full command of the facts.

She is constantly aware of the relationship between projects, and how her work on one task may benefit or effect another. Her advisory capacity as Catawba and Burke Counties discussed a merger of mental health services is one good example of this relational awareness, as is her work on both regional and local air quality committees.

Kitty Barnes has tremendous energy. An examination of her activities in just the last year, on a statewide scale, is a testimony to her capacity for doing many jobs well. She also has a strong belief in our common goal to provide the best possible government to our citizens, and has joined with us to encourage the Board and our staff to improve our "customer service" in recent years, and to make the striving for great customer service one of our foremost goals.

It is our honor to nominate Kitty Barnes for the M.H. "Jack" Brock Outstanding County Commissioner Award. We believe she is a prime example of the kind of public official the Association intended to honor when the award was created, and that she is very worthy of receiving the award in 2007.

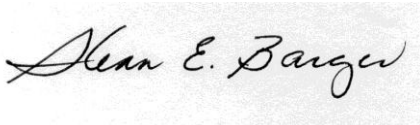
Sincerely,



Barbara Beatty, Vice-Chair  
Catawba County Board of Commissioners



Dan Hunsucker  
Catawba County Board of Commissioners



Glenn E. Barger  
Catawba County Board of Commissioners



Lynn M. Lail  
Catawba County Board of Commissioners

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